

## The Newark Museum

### IMLS Statewide Planning Grant - Narrative

#### 1 Needs and rationale

A consortium of New Jersey cultural institutions including The Newark Museum, and Rutgers University Libraries, which are private non-profit organizations, the New Jersey State Library, and the New Jersey State Museum, and New Jersey State Archives, which are entities within the New Jersey Department of State, seeks an Institute of Museum and Library Services Statewide Planning Grant to develop a conservation plan for the state of New Jersey. The committee will be augmented, during the year-long planning process, by advisors from additional cultural and professional organizations in the state to form a planning group representative of all sizes and disciplines of museums, libraries and archives. The project will result in a comprehensive assessment of conservation needs within New Jersey and the development of plans to address identified short and long-term conservation implementation priorities.

New Jersey is home to over 600 museums and historical societies, 400 libraries, and 80 established archives active in state-level professional associations. The materials held in public trust at these institutions reflect those surveyed in the Heritage Health Index and include rare books and manuscripts, photographs, documents, sound recordings, moving images, digital materials, art, historic and ethnographic objects, and natural science specimens. Cultural institutions range from living history villages and historic houses (Batsto Village, The Stickley Museum at Craftsman Farm) to museums and sites pre-dating the American Revolution (Old Barracks Museum) to comprehensive museums (New Jersey State Museum, The Newark Museum), to regional museums and repositories (The Noyes Museum of Art, Cape May County Historical Museum) as well as state, university, and local libraries (Rutgers University Libraries, Trenton Library) and archives (State Archives, Archives of the United Methodist Church in America).

With a population of 8,414,350 (2000 census), New Jersey is one of the most ethnically diverse states in the nation, with a long history of large immigrant populations from the colonial period to the present. New Jersey was the crossroads of the Revolutionary War, and its businesses and entrepreneurs led the nation's industrial revolution. While New Jersey cultural institutions have broad and deep collections that provide both orientation for new residents, historical depth for existing populations, and cultural, scientific, and educational explorations for all communities, it has very few preservation and conservation resources within the state; only two institutions maintain in-house conservation services. In addition, funding available for conservation projects within the state is limited; the New Jersey Historical Commission provides some grants, while the Public Archives and Records Infrastructure Support (PARIS) program provides money for conservation of county and municipal records.

There has been no statewide planning or assessment for the conservation and preservation of the diverse types of materials and objects entrusted to New Jersey's museums or libraries. The most recent strategic plan to address arts institutions, entitled "Arts Plan New Jersey" and still pending final approval, provides recommendations for several pressing areas for cultural organizations including increased arts participation and access, inclusion of technology, arts-in-education, and economic and community development. However, considering its focus on all arts disciplines, the plan does not address the need for a statewide conservation and preservation program for those institutions that maintain valuable collections. Regarding the state's numerous historic sites, The Task Force on New Jersey History report, "A Heritage Reclaimed: Report of the Task Force on New Jersey History" (1997) and subsequent "State History Plan" provides recommendations for "what must be done to preserve, promote and enjoy our historic sites" but with an emphasis on preserving structures versus a comprehensive focus on preserving collection materials.

New Jersey archive materials and historical state and county paper records have fared somewhat better in regards to strategic plans, assessments and funding for conservation and preservation. The Caucus Archival Projects Evaluation Service (CAPES), which is administered by the New Jersey Caucus of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference and made possible by a grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission, has produced a large body of consultant reports documenting the condition and needs of archival collections maintain by small local archives, libraries, and historical societies. "The Strategic Plan to Improve the Preservation, Collection, and Use of New Jersey Historical Records," issued by the New Jersey State Historical Records Advisory Board in 2001, "recommended goals, objectives, and action steps for

improving the preservation, collection, and use of New Jersey's historical records." The 2005 launch of the PARIS grant programs has produced conservation needs assessments for all 21 of New Jersey's counties and over 200 municipalities (by August 2008) across the state. The grant program addresses records management, preservation and storage needs and thus far has awarded \$5.5 million to local government agencies for paper conservation and \$3 million for reformatting.

The prime needs for almost all of New Jersey cultural institutions include training of individual staff members and volunteers in materials handling and care, guidance for the development of emergency planning, consultation for preservation needs, and treatment of collections. Many of these needs were exposed by the Heritage Health Index and are germane to the state:

- Environmental control: Controlling the environment is a challenge for all; the preponderance of small institutions in NJ without large budgets makes this a primary need. The mid-Atlantic climate, with seasonal changes and frequent rains and high humidity, is a particularly difficult one for object and artifact stability. Many of New Jersey's historical buildings date to the Colonial period and their age makes them difficult to stabilize.
- Storage conditions: Storage has been and will continue to be a primary concern as collections grow and expenses increase. Recent art warehousing projects in NJ have been met with overwhelming response; commercial ventures as well as RECAP, a storage consortium for archival collections, have become high-demand services. A possible goal for the consortium will be shared warehousing.
- Emergency planning: As mentioned above, few institutions in NJ have viable emergency plans and information on planning is met with enthusiasm. Models for emergency planning and disaster recovery must be developed for all types and sizes of cultural organizations.
- Conservation staffing: There is negligible staffing for preservation and conservation in NJ institutions. Collections maintenance is of a prime concern; some institutions have well-trained collection care staff, but most do not. Actual conservation work is minimal. State needs outpace the regional services available.

These needs were identified through a preliminary review of the strategic plans and assessments cited earlier in this application, and were also based upon the knowledge of the planning committee members who are aware of the needs of their institutions – all of which serve a statewide audience – as well as knowledge of a broader range of needs of other institutions through their involvement with professional associations and institutions in the state. Anecdotal evidence includes, for instance, the fact that emergency planning workshops developed by the Middlesex County Cultural Commission garner strong attendance; institutions within that county are eager to apply for grants geared toward preservation and conservation of collections. The Seton Hall University Museum Professions program regularly attracts students who work at small museums and historical associations across the state; they take several collection management courses so that they can begin to apply best standards to their own situations. The majority of help requests fielded by larger institutions within the state, including those represented on the planning committee, involve the need for preservation and conservation information.

In addition, many smaller institutions have no budgets for conservation and preservation; many indeed have no paid professional staff and depend on trained and sometimes untrained volunteers to oversee valuable and extensive collections and records. When there is funding, there is almost always a necessary search to find the right consultant. Long dependent on the services of conservators and consultants in New York, New England and Pennsylvania, New Jersey has reached a point where its needs are far greater than the available regional services can provide. For example, the New Jersey State Archives alone, during the last decade, has administered nearly \$1 million in paper conservation projects, much of which has been delayed by conservators' queues and limited availability. There are literally not enough conservators in the region to effectively serve the present needs of New Jersey cultural institutions.

As documented above, while all of the cited strategic plans and assessments seek to address equally important issues faced by many of New Jersey's cultural institutions, none have addressed the critical need for a statewide conservation

assessment and the development of an effective action plan that takes into account the incredibly diverse types of collection materials entrusted to New Jersey's cultural institutions. The planning committee seeks to address this issue to help ensure the unique and valuable art, science, humanities, archival, literary and historical collections held in public trust by New Jersey's cultural institutions are available for generations to come.

## **2 The Planning Process**

Through internal deliberations between the organizations, as well as discussions with IMLS staff through the New Jersey State Library, it was determined that a two-tiered planning group would be necessary to undertake the task of assessing the conservation needs of New Jersey cultural institutions, identifying conservation priorities and implementing the resulting plans for addressing these preservation issues. To be effective, the core planning group needed to be small, yet inclusive, and all core partners in the application needed to be collecting institutions that had directives or mission statements that included outreach to the entire state. In addition, core planning organizations needed to have the ability to commit the necessary staff time to the project, identifying a lead member and an alternate authorized to serve on the committee. In addition, it was decided that institutions of diverse size and discipline and from all parts of the state (northern, central and southern New Jersey) must be represented on the planning committee.

As a result of these discussions, it was determined that the following five major cultural organizations would serve as the core planning committee for the project: The Newark Museum (which served as a New Jersey representative at the 2007 National Conservation Summit), the New Jersey State Library (which also served as a New Jersey representative at the National Conservation Summit), the New Jersey State Archives, Rutgers University Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives and the New Jersey State Museum, all of which served as New Jersey representatives at the 2007 National Conservation Summit. This core planning committee will be augmented during the one-year planning process by additional representatives from five cultural organizations representing an expanded selection of New Jersey institutions. These second-tier participant organizations include the New Jersey Association of Museum, which represents all sizes and types of museums in the state; the New Jersey Library Association (Preservation Division), which services libraries and librarians statewide; the New Jersey Caucus of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, which is a forum for New Jersey archivists; the New Jersey Historical Society, which represents the amalgam of museum and archive; and the Monmouth County Historical Association, which represents a network of what is considered some of the finest historical properties in the state and was also a New Jersey representative at the National Conservation Summit. As second-tier participants, these representatives will send regular delegates to the planning meetings. The planning committee will also solicit input and participation from other associations as needed including ArtPride: New Jersey and Advocates for New Jersey History, which are state lobbying groups; the Archaeological Society of New Jersey; the State Historical Records Advisory Board; the League of Historical Societies; the New Jersey Historical Commission; and the Princeton Preservation Group. Participation by these organizations and associations will also help to promote awareness about the importance of implementing a statewide strategic plan for conservation and preservation of cultural collections.

There will be six bi-monthly planning committee meetings during the grant year; meetings will alternate from Newark (northern New Jersey) to New Brunswick (central New Jersey) to Trenton (south/central New Jersey), taking place in each city twice during the year. Extra meetings will be called as necessary. Central to the operation of the planning committee and the implementation of project objectives will be the hiring of a consultant/consulting firm to help guide the activities and communications of the committee, implement the survey process and formulate the resulting conservation plan for New Jersey collections. The work of the consultant and the planning committee will be enhanced through invitations to approximately four respected conservators of various fields to comment and provide their expertise and input into the plans developed by the committee.

The one-year planning process will achieve the following objectives:

### **1. Hire a consultant to review extant reports, develop the conservation survey and oversee committee operations**

The planning committee will hire a consultant/consulting firm who is familiar with the variety of fields (museums, libraries, and archives) that will be included in the project. A job description for the consultant position has been developed and is included as an attachment for this application. The description will be advertised widely and in appropriate publications and

web sites. The consultant must be able to draw together the institutions' similar needs and identify possible solutions that can be developed within the state. The consultant will design and implement the proposed statewide conservation assessment of cultural institutions to gather meaningful survey information, and will share the report, as well as recommendations for addressing the conservation needs, with the planning committee. The consultant will also manage the committee's meetings, communications and emerging documents to ensure information is shared with both the core planning committee as well as second-tier participants. While the consultant will be hired in agreement with members of the core planning committee, as project director Rebecca Buck, Deputy Director of Collection Services and Chief Registrar of The Newark Museum will serve as the primary day-to-day contact for the consultant and space will be made available at The Newark Museum for the consultant to work on-site as necessary.

## **2. Review extant reports and discuss previous conservation programs**

While a preliminary review of existing state planning programs was conducted in preparation for this application, the initial phase of the planning process will call for an in-depth review of the Heritage Health Index results as well as a comprehensive examination of existing conservation and preservation strategic plans. This evaluation process will help focus the anticipated conservation survey of statewide needs. In addition to a review of existing report materials, the core planning committee members will share an overview of their institutional needs and the five second-tier participants will present findings on conservation needs from their member organizations, as well as any information regarding work that has been undertaken or plans that have been partially or completely developed.

## **3. Develop and Implement Statewide Conservation Survey**

Based on the results of the report review process and following the format and strategies of the Heritage Health Index, the consultant, in collaboration with the planning committee, will develop and implement a survey to identify the conservation and preservation needs omitted by existing reports and strategic plans (it is known, for example that no comprehensive survey exists for museums or libraries whereas archives has been reviewed in several plans). The survey may include questions to retrieve definitive information on collection status, current budgeting trends for collections care and conservation, staff involved in this work, resources tapped for staff training, consultation for preservation, and direct conservation of objects within collections. As part of the survey implementation, the consultant will work with a facilitator to coordinate three focus group meetings in three regions of the state (north, central and south) to compile discussion group information and interview selected professionals within the various cultural fields. It is vital for NJ to develop resources for its cultural community while taking into account those resources already available in the neighboring states of New York and Pennsylvania; the development of a state identity for conservation with a perceived as well as a real increase in accessibility of information and services will be positioned to raise awareness and deliver more conservation work across the state.

## **4. Identify recommendations with guidance from professional conservators; review survey**

Four leaders in the conservation field will be invited to share best practices, present different conservation models and outcomes, and offer recommendations for addressing the conservation and preservation needs of New Jersey cultural institutions. Advisors will include a leader in conservation training for collection professionals, a leader in storage development for cultural institutions, a director of a regional conservation laboratory, and a director of an institutional laboratory that undertakes statewide outreach. As a result of this process and the development of a statewide conservation survey, a workable plan will be developed with the intention of implementation depending on financial resources. The plan will be developed in anticipation of the IMLS Implementation grant, which could help provide funding to execute the solutions.

## **Anticipated Outcomes of the Planning Process**

The one-year planning process will result in the following outcomes:

1. A comprehensive report on the conservation and preservation needs of New Jersey's museums, libraries, historical societies and archive institutions.
2. The identification of conservation priorities, both short and long-term, within the state and among institution type.
3. Recommendations for addressing the conservation priorities and needs presented as a workable plan and developed with the intention of implementation. Anticipated solutions could include the development of a

conservation consortium to provide consultation, creation of training courses for individuals ranging from materials handling to emergency planning, shared warehousing plans, and active conservation laboratories. It is probable that New Jersey needs a solid training program. It is also likely that plans for shared storage and for an eventual conservation laboratory with a strong educational component would be feasible within the state.

4. Development of the report and recommendations into a model statewide plan in anticipation of applying for an IMLS Implementation Grant to help provide funding needed to execute the comprehensive action plan.
5. A greater understanding of the importance of the conservation and preservation of collections among not only concerned cultural professionals, but among state officials, audiences and other stakeholders.

### **3 Project Resources: Budget and Personnel**

Representatives of the core planning institutions who were instrumental to the development of this project and application hold senior level positions within their institutions, are actively responsible or involved in the conservation and preservation care of institution collections and possess years of expertise within their respective fields. They are Rebecca Buck, Deputy Director of Collection Services and Chief Registrar at The Newark Museum who serves as the project director; Jeffery Moy, Archivist at The Newark Museum; Joseph Klett, Deputy Director for Archives at the New Jersey Division of Archives and Records Management (State Archives); Michele Stricker, Consultant, Library Services Bureau at the New Jersey State Library; Margaret O'Reilly, Assistant Curator, Fine Art Collections and Exhibitions at the New Jersey State Museum; and Farideh Tehrani, Preservation Administrator at Rutgers Special Collections and University Archives. Resumes for each member is included with this application and required partnership statements outline the expertise and role the institutions will play in the implementation of the planning process. The core planning committee members will guide the project with additional information provided by the delegates from the second-tier organizations. In the event a core planning member is unable to attend a meeting, each member has identified an alternate who will assume the participatory role if needed (resumes for alternates are also attached). Salary and fringe benefits of core members and alternates have been identified as cost share for this application.

The allocation of the \$40,000 grant award will be as follows: Approximately \$28,000 of the budget will be used for fees necessary to secure the services of the conservation planning committee consultant. This allocation is determined upon consultant rates estimated at \$700 per day, which is based on responses to a series of queries recently made to possible consultants by The Newark Museum. A sample contract outlining the necessary qualification for the consultant is attached to this application. An additional \$4,000 will be designated for focus group expenses, and \$225 will support the dissemination of the conservation report. The remaining \$7,775 will be used for honorariums and travel costs for the conservation advisors who will make recommendations for addressing New Jersey's conservation needs and priorities. Possible conservators include Wendy Jessup, Wendy Jessup Associates, Virginia (general assessment and storage); Thomas Branchick, Director, Williamstown Regional Conservation Laboratory, Williamstown, Massachusetts (regional conservator); Barbara Heller, Head Conservator, Detroit Institute for the Arts, Detroit, Michigan (Administrator of statewide services program); and Evelyn Frangakis, Aaron and Clara Greenhut Rabinowitz Chief Librarian for Preservation in the Research Libraries of The New York Public Library, New York (library preservation).

The work resulting from the one-year planning process will be sustained through the following initiatives: First, an anticipated outcome of the project will be the investigation into forming the planning committee into an efficient and cost-effective legal organization – a conservation consortium that will be charged with furthering the work started by this project and advocating for the importance of the conservation and preservation of collections throughout the state. Second, the planning process will include a conservation blog developed by The Newark Museum and a wiki developed by the Rutgers Libraries that will, as the planning process progresses, raise awareness of conservation issues within the state. The outcomes, if they are completely successful, could include the conservation laboratory that would attract talented conservators from throughout the country and could meet the needs of New Jersey cultural institutions for years to come. At the very least, the planning process will make the state's cultural institutions aware of priority conservation and preservation needs within New Jersey and in a position to act positively to address those needs. At best, as plans are developed, commitments made and conservation programs put in place, the project could eventually provide the state with needed services to save cultural resources for future generations.